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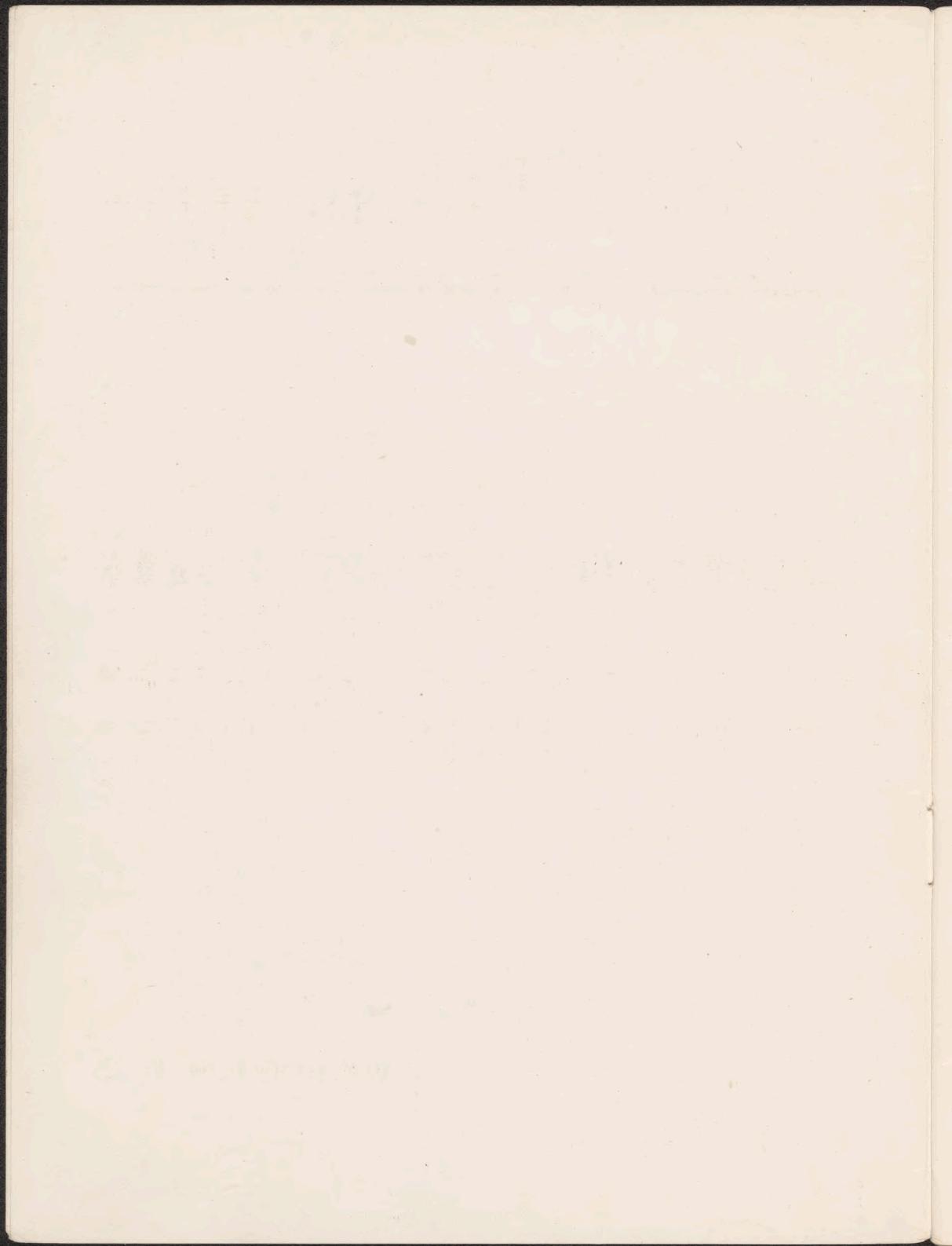
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1948

**CARPETS  
FOR  
THE  
GREAT  
SHAH**

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART



THE CORCORAN  
GALLERY OF ART      BULLETIN  
VOL. 2 NO. 1 OCTOBER 1948

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**CARPETS FOR THE GREAT SHAH**

**THE NEAR-EASTERN CARPETS FROM  
THE W. A. CLARK COLLECTION**

**WASHINGTON, D. C.**

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THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

H. K. PRESS, WASHINGTON, D. C.

## Prefatory Note

**CARPETS FOR THE GREAT SHAH** the subject of this BULLETIN, is published to serve as a catalogue for the special exhibition of selected examples from the internationally famous W. A. Clark Collection of Near-Eastern carpets which, resplendent in their newly reconditioned state, will be on view from October 3 through November 16. Its introduction and catalogue are moreover, of permanent value to collectors, scholars and others interested in this fascinating, if somewhat esoteric, field.

Based on the original documentation of the great rug expert, Rudolph Rieftahl, the catalogue data has been checked and supplemented in the light of recent developments by Amy Briggs of the staff. Miss Briggs has been aided in her research by the expert advice of Dr. Richard Ettinghausen, Associate of Near Eastern Art at the Freer Gallery of Art. Similarly, Louisa Ballinger, of the Textile Museum of the District of Columbia has given us invaluable aid in the technical examination of the carpets. To each of these, and to the other members of the staff who have assisted in the preparation of this study, the Gallery is most grateful.

HERMANN WARNER WILLIAMS, JR.

1860 JULY 24 - 1860

Left Washington D.C. at 7 A.M. This morning I had  
a long talk with Mr. T. C. Tracy about the money and the  
possibility of getting it. He said he would do what he could  
but that he did not know if he could get it. I told him I  
thought it was a good idea and that I would go to New York  
and see if I could get it there. He said he would help me.

Arrived at New York at 1 P.M. and went to the office of the  
New York Stock Exchange. There I met Mr. J. G. Morgan  
who told me that he would help me to get the money.

At 2 P.M. I went to the office of the New York Stock  
Exchange and saw Mr. J. G. Morgan. He told me that he  
would help me to get the money.

At 3 P.M. I went to the office of the New York Stock  
Exchange and saw Mr. J. G. Morgan. He told me that he  
would help me to get the money.

At 4 P.M. I went to the office of the New York Stock  
Exchange and saw Mr. J. G. Morgan. He told me that he  
would help me to get the money.

At 5 P.M. I went to the office of the New York Stock  
Exchange and saw Mr. J. G. Morgan. He told me that he  
would help me to get the money.

At 6 P.M. I went to the office of the New York Stock  
Exchange and saw Mr. J. G. Morgan. He told me that he  
would help me to get the money.

At 7 P.M. I went to the office of the New York Stock  
Exchange and saw Mr. J. G. Morgan. He told me that he  
would help me to get the money.

# CARPETS FOR THE GREAT SHAH

CARPETS have always been especially esteemed in the East where their weaving has a recorded history of nearly two thousand years. Essential household equipment for prince and nomad, they are also great creative works of art . . . manifestations of esthetic sensibility and reflections of philosophical or spiritual concepts.

Persia has long been a center for the production of fine rugs. We know through literary references, of one famous carpet owned by Khusrau, a King of Persia during the Sassanian Period (A.D. 226-637). It was enriched with gold and precious stones, and the design was said to have had the luxuriance of a "spring garden." A great flowering of the art occurred in the sixteenth century during the reign of Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1629), of the Safavid dynasty (1499-1736). These rugs are distinguished by a rich floral decoration which was especially pleasing to the Great Shah Abbas and his court at Isfahan in Central Persia. The taste of this forceful patron of the arts and the influence of the style he favored can be seen in many rugs in the William A. Clark Collection. Five Turkish and Indian carpets, in addition, demonstrate that the flower style perfected in Persia was also admired at courts to the east and west.

The beautiful effects of these fine pile carpets is largely the result of a technique that is slow and painstaking. Depth and pattern are attained by tying additional colored threads around pairs of the warp threads, which are vertical on the upright loom, and trimming their ends off evenly. The Sehna or Persian

Children's Art Room



✓

Illus. 1

P17

method of tying knots is used in all the Clark Oriental Carpets. After each row of knots, two or three of the horizontal weft threads are introduced, which with the warp, constitute the ground structure of the rug (Fig. 1, page 7).

Wool, cotton and silk were all used in the manufacturing of rugs.<sup>1</sup> Since the nomads had plenty of wool, they employed it for warp and weft as well as pile, but in town or court factories cotton was commonly used for the ground structure. In especially fine pieces, the warp sometimes was made of silk, (P 7),<sup>2</sup> as were also the pile and some of the wefts in the luxurious so-called "Polish" rugs (P 32-35). For the further enrichment of certain areas, gold or silver threads were made by twisting flat bands of metal around strands of white or yellow silk which were then brocaded into the ground structure to replace the pile.



Illus. I, Detail. Cloud bands attached to palmette.

P17

<sup>1</sup> For information on the technique of carpet weaving see: Sarre, F. and Trenkwald, H., OLD ORIENTAL CARPETS (Vienna, 1926), I 16-19; and Tattersall, C., NOTES ON CARPET KNOTTING AND WEAVING, Victoria and Albert Museum (London, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> "P" references indicate a Persian rug; see catalogue for complete designation. Other reference symbols are "I" for Indian and "T" for Turkish examples.

The rectangle is by far the most common shape of Oriental carpets. Variations occur, however, woven to meet particular needs, such as the circular rug presumably woven for a tent (P 1). Imperial rugs are often extraordinarily large; one of ours is over forty-four feet long and fourteen feet wide (P 12). Small carpets often served for dais or throne (P 17, Illus. I). In a well-appointed home, a fine carpet would occupy the center of an important room with long narrow runners on either side serving for general use.

Persian rugs are invariably designed with a large central area called the field, and a border running around all four sides. The latter is usually composed of a wide band and smaller secondary borders, some of which are ornamented while others are lines of plain color acting as foils to the intricate patterns they separate. Borders in Persian carpets, except those of the "Vase" style (P 31, Illus. II) are of prime importance, not merely adjuncts to the field. A happy relation of border to field and a skillful solution of the problem of turning the corners are proofs of the artistry both of designer and maker.

The motifs used in the decoration of the rugs in the Clark Collection are almost entirely cursive plant forms. They may be Islamic inventions called "arabesques" (P 28, Illus. III, Detail) or more natural flower and leaf motifs (P 1, Illus. IV, Detail), many of which apparently were imported from China after the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century. From China came the ever-present cloud band, floating free (P 14, Illus. V, Detail) or attached symmetrically to a palmette (P 17, Illus. I, Detail), and blossoms like the peony. Naturally, these borrowed motifs were modified by Iranian ideas and forms, which in turn were often inherited from ancient Near-Eastern or Classic art. For example, opulent palmette blossoms suggest derivation from the Classic palmette as well as the peony and lotus (P 31, Illus. II); Chinese cloud bands were made to resemble Persian arabesques. A motif given new importance and functions in the days of Shah Abbas was the serrated or lanceolate leaf

(P 31, Illus. II). These motifs and many others symbolize the fertility and beauty of gardens long cherished in arid Iran.

In Persian art, color and vitality of line are more important than symmetry. Leaves and blossoms appear in such profusion that an underlying design is difficult to see. But, a good rug always has a basic plan controlling pattern and color. Borders, with a dominant color contrasting to that of the field, establish firm boundaries, much as the paths of Persian gardens impose a formal pattern on the tangle of verdure and flowers.<sup>3</sup> Complete originality was not expected of the carpet designer as it is of artists today. Yet, designing such carpets demanded not only an innate sense for exquisite decoration but creative energy as well. In the best Persian rugs, color schemes and patterns, even when traditional, were organized with miraculous finesse, vitality and fresh imagination. That the designers' creative function was understood in Persia in the sixteenth century is indicated by an inscription woven into the border of a noted carpet in the collection of the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum, Milan, which claims that its flowers are inventions surpassing those of nature.

"... a garden-plot is ashamed before its face.

Before its roses a rose garden is but a thorn; . . ."<sup>4</sup>

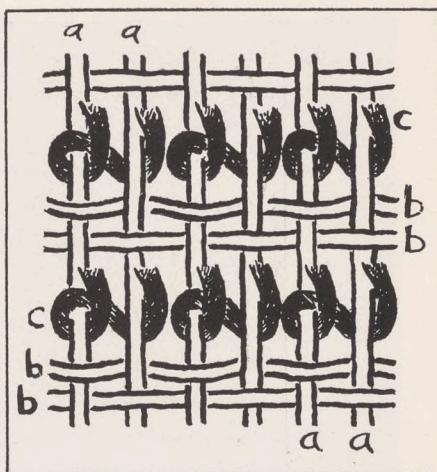


Fig. 1. Diagram of carpet weaving; (a) warp threads, (b) weft threads, (c) pile knots of the Sehna type.

<sup>3</sup> For information about Persian gardens see: Pope, A. U. and Ackerman, P., A SURVEY OF PERSIAN ART (London and New York, 1938-39), II, IV, Chap. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Sarre and Trenkwald, OP. CIT., II, Pl. 29.



Illus. II

Note large palmettes and lanceolate leafs stemming from them

The majority of the rugs in the Clark Collection are of the Herat type. By their patterns and quality, they are associated with the city of that name, now in Afghanistan, but once the capital of an East-Persian province ruled by the Timurids, and a glorious center of art production during the fifteenth century. While few, if any, existing Persian carpets can be dated in the fifteenth century, a study of the rugs so meticulously rendered in the miniature paintings of the period reveal that many of the decorative motifs and patterns found in later Herat rugs were in use at this time. The underlying scheme of extant Herat rugs—a field of bisymmetric floral scrolls on a rose ground—appears in one of these miniatures by Bihzad, the greatest Persian painter and apparently also a master rug designer.<sup>5</sup> It is tempting to see in this bisymmetric plan the ubiquitous Tree of Life dividing the realms of Sun and Moon; for such traditional motifs are deeply rooted in ancient symbolism which persisted even through centuries of Mohammedanism.

The Clark Collection of Near-Eastern Rugs shows the development of the Herat style through the later Safavid Dynasty. From the earliest rugs which date in the second half of the sixteenth century, the style is shown by fine examples until its conclusion as a creative art form in the eighteenth century. During the last century of the Safavid Dynasty, rug designers gradually lost the qualities of refinement, grace and elegance which had characterized the earlier examples, (P 1-3). Restraint was replaced by bold flamboyance (P 12), round curves, once so graceful, became angularized and, in general, a decline in both inventiveness and technique can be noted. Nevertheless, even the latest Herat rugs possess an appeal in their own right, and the complete collection, with its related "Polish," Indian and Turkish examples, presents a vivid recording of a great carpet tradition.

<sup>5</sup> Binyon, L., Wilkinson, J. and Gray, B., PERSIAN MINIATURE PAINTING (London, 1933), Pl. LXVII. For a study of carpets represented in Timurid miniature paintings see Briggs, A., "Timurid Carpets," ARS ISLAMICA, VII (1940), 20-54; XI-XII (1946), 146-159.



Illus. III, Detail of arabesque design

P28

*Strange*

# CATALOGUE

## OF THE NEAR-EASTERN RUGS IN THE W. A. CLARK COLLECTION

The scientific classification of Oriental carpets is still in the formative stage, with many problems in provenance and dating still unsolved, and much confusion in terminology. For instance, "Herat" and "Polish" are both well-known and widely used terms; yet, the first applies to rug designs presumably originating in the city of Herat, and the second refers primarily to materials and technique; for "Polish" rugs actually are Persian. Other terminology is as much the result of tradition, chance and habit as are these.

For the purpose of the exhibition the Clark rugs are divided into three groups; Persian, Indian and Turkish, indicated respectively by the letters P, I, and T, followed by a consecutive number. Sub-divisions within groups have also been made. Generally the arrangement within sections is chronological.

Individual entries include the following data: the approximate date, dimensions (length preceding width), the technique used, present condition (where appropriate) and the accession number.

Only those items marked with an asterisk are included in the exhibition.

# PERSIAN RUGS

## Section I

### RUGS IN THE HERAT STYLE

*Clara & May (package)*

**P 1\***

#### SECOND HALF OF THE SIXTEENTH

CENTURY

17 ft. 2 in. x 7 ft. 8 in.; 170 knots to the square inch.  
Silk warp, cotton weft, wool pile; patched and some-  
what worn. (26.273)

Illus. IV, Detail

**P 2**

#### LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

13 ft. 5½ in. x 5 ft. 11½ in.; 130 knots to the square  
inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.302)

Illus. VI

**P 3\***

#### SIXTEENTH CENTURY

13 ft. 3 in. x 5 ft. 7 in.; 90 knots to the square  
inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile; very worn  
with the border at one end completely rewoven

(26.265)

**P 4\***

#### SIXTEENTH CENTURY

7 ft. x 4 ft. 11 in.; 200 knots to the square inch.  
Silk warp, cotton weft, wool pile (26.287)

P 5\*

LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

14 ft. 7 in. x 9 ft. 10 in.; 144 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile; rewoven patch in one corner (26.295)

*to be hung Cloud Stair*

P 6

LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

13 ft. 9 in. x 9 ft. 7 in. 120 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.264)

L

P 7\*

LATE SIXTEENTH OR EARLY SEVENTEENTH  
CENTURY

8 ft. 4 in. x 4 ft. 4½ in.; 192 knots to the square inch. Silk warp, cotton weft, wool pile, and metal brocade (26.293)

P 8

LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

13 ft. 8 in. x 5 ft. 11 in.; 110 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.267)

P 9

SIXTEENTH CENTURY

19 ft. 5 in. x 9 ft. 10 in.; 110 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile; very worn and fragmentary with little left of the original rug (26.276)

Cloud Study package  
possibly



Illus. IV, Detail of natural flower motifs

26,273

P1

**P 10**

LATE SIXTEENTH OR EARLY SEVENTEENTH  
CENTURY

16 ft. 2 in. x 6 ft. 8 in.; 100 knots to the square  
inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.260)

*to the left of Clad. Stairs*  
**P 11\***      EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

22 ft. 4 in. x 9 ft. 2 in.; 140 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.272)

Illus. VII

*Corridor outside Clad. Study*  
**P 12\***      EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

44 ft. 1 in. x 14 ft. 2 in.; 130 knots to the square  
inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.277)

*opp. entrance*  
**P 13**      LATE SIXTEENTH OR EARLY SEVENTEENTH  
CENTURY

26 ft. 7 in. x 13 ft. 6 in.; 120 knots to the square  
inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile; worn and  
mended (26.269)

*Clad. Study unrolled*  
**P 14**      EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

22 ft. 4 in. x 9 ft. 6 in.; 120 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.298)

Illus. V. Detail

**P 15\***

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

27 ft. 11½ in. x 11 ft. 6 in.; 120 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.274)

*French Room*

**P 16\***

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

26 ft. 6 in. x 10 ft. 7 in.; 100 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.296)

*Dutch & Flemish Room*

**P 17\***

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

6 ft. 8½ in. x 4 ft. 7½ in.; 144 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.300)

Illus. I

**P 18**

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

6 ft. 1½ in. x 4 ft. 5 in.; 120 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.285)

**P 19**

SEVENTEENTH OR EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

6 ft. 8 in. x 4 ft. 7 in.; 110 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.282)



Illus. V, Detail

Note white floating band in upper center

P14

*Clark Study*

**P 20**

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

6 ft. 2½ in. x 4 ft. ½ in.; 144 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.279)

**P 21**

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

8 ft. 6 in. x 4 ft. 10½ in.; 100 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.283)

**P 22**

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

10 ft. 11 in. x 5 ft. 2 in.; 140 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.266)

**P 23\***

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

11 ft. 2½ in. x 5 ft. 2 in.; 200 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.270)

*- Strange*

**P 24\***

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

14 ft. 7 in. x 6 ft. 6 in.; 100 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile; large rewoven section toward one end (26.268)



Illus. VI, Detail

P2

V

P 25

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

18 ft. 1 in. x 8 ft. 2 in.; 120 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp and weft, wool pile; many repairs  
(26.261)

P 26

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

9 ft. 10 in. x 7 ft. 11 in.; 80 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp and weft, wool pile; very worn, patched  
and fragmentary (26.280)

P 27

LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

11 ft. 2 in. x 5 ft. 11 in.; 90 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp and weft, wool pile; seam across the  
rug indicates a section is missing from the center  
(26.301)

*Section II*

ARABESQUE AND VASE RUGS

P 28\*

SIXTEENTH CENTURY ARABESQUE RUG

26 ft. x 10 ft. 3 in.; 140 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.271)  
Illus. III

*Storage*

P 29

LATE SIXTEENTH OR EARLY SEVENTEENTH  
CENTURY ARABESQUE AND FLOWER RUG

32 ft. 1 in. x 12 ft. 1 in.; 100 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.281)

*Jing Hall*



Illus. VII, Detail

P11



Illus. VIII

P35

**P 30\***

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ARABESQUE RUG

14 ft. x 8 ft. 6 in.; 110 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.275)

Illus. IX

*Small hall 2nd floor*

**P 31\***

EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY VASE RUG

8 ft. 8 in. x 6 ft. 4 in.; 224 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp, wool weft (26.278)

Illus. II

*Section III*

*"POLISH" RUGS*

**P 32\***

EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

6 ft. 7 in. x 4 ft. 9 in.; 180 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp, silk and cotton wefts, silk pile, metal brocade (26.289)

**P 33\***

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

6 ft. 9 in. x 4 ft. 9½ in.; 225 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp, silk and cotton wefts, silk pile, traces of metal brocade, very worn (26.292)

**P 34\***

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

6 ft. 7 in. x 4 ft. 8½ in.; 144 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp, silk and cotton wefts, silk pile; some cotton repairs (26.291)



✓

Illus. IX

upstairs small hall P30

**P 35\***      EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

6 ft. 5½ in. x 4 ft. 6 in.; 210 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp, silk and cotton wefts, silk pile  
Illus. VIII (26.288)

# INDIAN RUGS

## I 1\* SEVENTEENTH CENTURY WOOLEN RUG

6 ft. 8 in. x 5 ft.; 120 knots to the square inch. Cotton warp and weft, wool pile (26.297)

## I 2\* SEVENTEENTH CENTURY SILK RUG

7 ft. 3 in. x 5 ft. 1/2 in.; 168 knots to the square inch.  
Cotton warp and weft, silk pile (26.286)

# TURKISH WEAVES

**T 1\***

SIXTEENTH CENTURY CIRCULAR WOOLEN  
RUG

8 ft. x 7 ft. 4 in.; 100 knots to the square inch. Wool  
warp, weft, and pile; the warp threads are dyed  
light green and twisted to the left, the left twist is  
characteristic of Egyptian weaving (26.294)

**T 2\***

LATE SIXTEENTH OR SEVENTEENTH  
CENTURY WOOLEN RUG

6 ft. 6 in. x 4 ft. 4½ in.; 110 knots to the square  
inch. Wool warp, weft, and pile (26.284)

**T 3\***

LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY TURKISH  
TEXTILE

5 ft. 11 in. x 4 ft. 1 in.  
Velvet with metal brocade (26.290)

